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UM WEAVERS SPIN YARNS

by Kaye Caskey
UM INFORMATION SERVICES

MISSOULA-----

Four days every week, for one hour each day, eight women enrolled in the University of Montana Summer Session sit peacefully in a sunlit room in the Women's Center, learning how to weave.

Mrs. Margaret Whitney, a member of the Missoula Weavers Guild, teaches the two-credit course under the jurisdiction of the home economics department. She is called in each spring to give weaving instructions and is teaching the month long course in the summer for the first time in five years.

Mrs. Whitney said recently that she emphasizes creative techniques in weaving and requires her students to make small samples of many weaving patterns, using coarse and fine threads as well as woolen yarns.

The University spinning room has 12 looms, most of which are floor looms. The weaver sits at a loom about the size of a desk and works treadles with her feet, leaving her hands free to manipulate the yarns.

The University also has two large floor looms, one of which is 40 inches wide. A single loom similar to those owned by UM costs about \$400 but members in good standing of a weaver's guild usually have looms at their convenience wherever they might be.

Weaving is a complex art, commanding a unique language. First the yarn is placed on a "warping board", where the threads are prepared to place ^{length}wise on the loom. Other threads on the loom are "weft", or set for the purpose of interlacing through a specific design.

(more)

Designs are created when the weaver presses a specific treadle thereby dropping a harness into the threads. The harness holds heddles which keep the threads apart or hold them together in forming a design.

Eight different techniques are taught in beginning weaving. Once the student learns the basics of weaving, Mrs. Whitney said, that person will be able to do nearly any kind of design. "There isn't anyone who will live long enough to do all the weaving planned once bitten by the weaving bug," Mrs. Whitney said.

Mrs. Whitney stressed that weaving does not have to be done on an expensive loom. Some elementary teachers teach simple weaving on tagboard looms, or on looms constructed from wooden sticks.

Carol Powalisz, a summer student, of Manitowoc, Wisc., who teaches fourth grade at Rattlesnake School in Missoula, teaches weaving on tagboard looms in her classroom.

Another Summer Session student, Mrs. Delores Myllymaki, a Stevensville fourth grade teacher, has one small table loom in her classroom.

Mrs. Whitney said that looms are quite expensive today because more people are discovering enjoyment and creativity in weaving. She pointed out that weaving is synonymous with therapy. "If I'm so tired that I can't do anything else, I'm still happy to weave," Mrs. Whitney said.

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